Scenery Management System (SMS)

Background

People value the scenery, recreation resources, and special places on our national forests. It is important to consider these resources equally with all other natural resources on national forests, in order to provide public lands that are socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable for present and future generations.

The Scenery Management System (SMS) provides an approach to determine the value and importance of scenery, and to ensure high quality scenery for future generations. The SMS process identifies scenic resources as they relate to people, maps these resources, and assigns a value for aesthetics. Ecological concepts are integral to the SMS by including ecological processes and disturbance patterns in its foundation, scenic character. Natural disturbances such as fire, insects, and disease play an important role in how landscapes change over time and, consequentially, how scenery changes over time.

Scenery Management in LMP Revision

As part of LMP revision, the Forest completes an inventory of scenic resources. This inventory contains the following steps:

Scenic character description

A scenic character description is a narrative describing the physical, biological and cultural images that give an area it scenic identity and contribute to its sense of place.

Scenic Attractiveness

Scenic Attractiveness is a rating of the diversity and intrinsic beauty of the landscape based on landform, water characteristics, and vegetation patterns. A polygon feature class is mapped in GIS.

- A = Distinctive (unique, unusual, or outstanding scenic quality)
- B = Typical (common to the area)
- C = Indistinctive (little variety)

Constituent Analysis/ Concern Levels

Concern Levels are the importance of scenery to those viewing it. Concern Level Travelways include both primary and secondary roads and trails. Concern Level Use Points are areas that receive concentrated public-viewing use. Concern Levels are mapped as lines and points in GIS. There are three levels of concern:

- One = High Interest in Scenery
- Two = Moderate Interest in Scenery
- Three = Low Interest in Scenery

Landscape Visibility

Landscape Visibility is a map of what is potentially visible from the Concern Levels and distance from the observer (Distance Zone). Foreground (Fg) is less than 1/2 mile, Middleground (Mg) is 1/2 mile to 4 miles, and Background (Bg) are areas greater than 4 miles away. There are also Seldom Seen (ss) areas that are not seen or seldom seen from the identified concern level travelways or points. A polygon feature class is mapped in GIS.

Scenic Classes

Scenic Classes are the importance of scenery for comparison with other resources. They are a combination of Landscape Visibility and Scenic Attractiveness to be used for analysis and planning purposes. A polygon feature class is mapped in GIS.

Existing scenic integrity

Existing Scenic Integrity is a map showing the intactness of scenic character attributes. It is the current state of the landscape (existing condition) considering previous human alterations. A polygon feature class is mapped in GIS.

- Very High – Unaltered = landscapes where the valued scenic character is intact with only minute if any deviations.
- High – Appears Unaltered = landscapes where the valued scenic character "appears" intact. Deviations may be present but must repeat the form, line, color, texture, and pattern common in the landscape so completely that they are not evident.
- Moderate – Slightly Altered = landscapes where the valued scenic character "appears slightly altered". Noticeable deviations must remain visually subordinate to the scenic character being viewed.
- Low /Very Low – Moderately to Heavily Altered = landscapes where the valued scenic character "appears moderately to heavily altered." Deviations may begin to dominate the valued scenic character.

Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs)

Using the information in the above steps as guidance, a draft map of forest-wide desired condition is produced. These draft scenic integrity levels provide the desired conditions for scenery across the forest, ranging from Very High Scenic Integrity to Very Low Scenic Integrity. Draft scenic integrity levels are used within the LMP development phase to consider effects and desired conditions for scenery with other resources, and the scenic integrity levels become Scenic Integrity Objectives once a final plan alternative is adopted. Once a final alternative is adopted, a forest-wide Scenic Integrity Objectives map is finalized and accompanies the LMP. This map represents desired scenic integrity forest-wide. The definitions for each objectives are the same as those listed above.

Scenery Management at the Project Level

The Scenic Integrity Objectives map from the revised LMP is used to manage scenic resources and move areas of the forest toward desired conditions for scenery. SIOs are used along with ecological concepts to determine potential effects to scenery from proposed management activities and scenarios. The other various maps from the SMS inventory can provide more information for project and midscale planning in specific areas, if desired.

The Scenic Integrity Objectives assist interdisciplinary planning teams in assigning appropriate levels of mitigation or project design features where necessary.